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Tagore in debate with Gandhi: freedom as creativity

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1947) rose to the occasion in supporting each other at crucial moments during the Indian struggle for independence. They were both experimenters with distinctive views, but their views were very different, which is why I believe there was collaboration without meeting of minds. Their letters to each other and published controversies from 1915 to 1941 have been recorded by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya.[1] I notice four major themes behind Tagore's side of the debate.

1. *Creativity*

It is harder in one way, I think, to write about Tagore's side of the debate than about Gandhi's, because of Gandhi's deliberate attempt to build up a coherent life view. He could come later in life to new ideas and still adapt them sufficiently to weave them into a consistent whole with his earlier ideas. It is harder to find consistent themes running through Tagore's side of the debate, because he is often responding to a new proposal of Gandhi's and his response may be tied to the immediate context. But there are ongoing themes in Tagore as well, and an important and prominent one is provided by his insistence on creativity. He tells us in 1936 in *The Religion of an Artist*,[2] (p. 689) that the whole atmosphere of his childhood home – he was born in 1861 – was permeated by the spirit of creation. In the special case of a *poet's* creativity, it was very close to his heart and his ideas about creation in poetry appear equally in the debate with Gandhi (*Tagore's reflections on non-cooperation and cooperation*, 1928, p. 56) and in two later works (The Hibbert Lectures, 1930, published 1931 as *The Religion of Man*, 1931[3] and *The Religion of an Artist*, 1936). In *The Religion of Man*, Ch. 6, (pp. 59-60), he relates his composition of poetry to the Lord of his life. 'To this Being', he says, 'I was responsible; for the creation within me is his as well as mine. It may be that it was the same creative mind that is shaping the universe to its eternal idea; but in me as a person it had one of its special centres of a personal relationship growing into a deepening

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[1] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet*, National Book Trust, New Delhi 1997.

[2] *The Religion of an Artist*, 1936, repr. *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* vol. 3, new Delhi 1996, pp. 683-697.

[3] Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1931.

consciousness. … I lent myself to a travail of creation that ever exceeded my own personal bounds. … It gave me great joy to feel in my life detachment at the idea of a mystery of a meeting of the two in a creative comradeship. I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man.' He goes on to quote the poems he addressed to the Lord of his life:

Thou who art the innermost spring of my being,
Art thou pleased,
Lord of my life?
For I gave to thee my cup
Filled with all the pain and delight
That the crushed grapes of my heart had surrendered,
I wove with the rhythm of colours and songs the cover
for thy bed,
and with the molten gold of my desires
I fashioned playthings for thy passing hours.

I know not why thou choosest me for thy partner,
Lord of my life!
Didst thou store my days and nights,
my deeds and dreams for the alchemy of thy art,
and string in the chain of thy music my songs of autumn and spring?'

Here in *The Religion of Man*, Ch. 6, he insists 'I am neither a scholar nor a philosopher.' (p. 56) My religion is a poet's religion' (p. 58), and he repeats his claim to a poet's religion in *The Religion of an Artist* (p. 689), where he identifies God as the God of rhythms (p. 692): 'Has not science shown us the fact that the ultimate difference between one element and another is only that of rhythm? The fundamental distinction of gold from mercury lies merely in the difference of rhythm in their respective constitution. … There you find behind the scene the Artist, the magician of rhythm, who imparts an appearance of substance to the insubstantial'. But this whole line of thought was already expressed in 1921 in the debate with Gandhi, in *Tagore's reflections on non-cooperation and cooperation* (S. Bhattacharya p.56): 'Are not flowers and leaves never ending experiments in metre? Is not my God an eternal waster of time? He flings stars and planets in the whirlwind of changes, he floats paper boats of ages, filled with his fancies on the rushing stream of appearance. When I tease him and beg him to allow me to remain his little follower and accept a few trifles of mine as the cargo of his playboat he smiles and I trot behind him catching the hem of his robe'.

Poetry, however, was only one form of creativity. Creativity is found also in many other forms in the other three debates with Gandhi between 1921 and 1925. Thus in *Striving for Swaraj*, 1925 (S. Bhattacharya pp.

120-1),[4] Tagore talks repeatedly about creating your country and complains that people are taking no hand in creating their country, but we have a right to do so. His examples of the 'processes of creation' or 'creative act' are not poetry, but driving an epidemic from your village, and the villagers earning for themselves their health, food and education. In doing this, they will be 'consciously rejoicing in its [the village's] creation'. Moreover, the creation of villages can lead to the creation of the country. 'If even the people of one village of India, by the exercise of their own powers, make their village their very own, then and there will begin the work of realising our country as our own'. In *The Call of Truth*, 1921 (S. Bhattacharya pp. 68-9), he says that Providence distinguished men from bees which make identical cells in their hives by displaying a sudden accession of 'creative courage'. The development of man was not dependent like that of animals on natural selection. Instead, man set to work with flints to make better weapons, which were the 'creation of his own inner faculties', and he progressed from flints to iron and from iron to steel. The same is true nowadays (pp. p. 70-1). Our country is there to be realised. That only can be a man's true country which he can help to 'create' by his wisdom and will, his love and his actions. But the emotion of the early resistance movement starting in 1905 had had no creative power (pp. 72-3). Now Gandhi has come, is 'spin and weave, spin and weave', the call to new creation? (p. 81). In *The Cult of the Charka* , 1925, (S. Bhattacharya p. 100-1), he complains that the division of labour among different castes is an imitation of the social scheme of ant-life and 'kills the mind of a man … whose work is creation.'

Earlier than that in *Nationalism*, 1917, he had already spoken of the importance of creativity in explaining why he was against the idea of a *nation*, where this is defined as the aspect of a whole people as an organised *power*.[5] He goes on immediately to complain, 'This strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative'. He goes on, 'It was my conviction that what India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself'. In contrast 'The vast powers of nature … reveal their truth … in beauty. … Commercialism with its barbarity of ugly decoration is a terrible menace to humanity, because it is setting up the ideal of power over that of perfection'. Tagore's concern with beauty connects with his wearing the most magnificent robes. I have quoted elsewhere a description of him at the Philosophical Congress in Calcutta

[4] I shall repeat the dates, so that the chronology will be easy to follow, and also note where a publication is referring back to a pre-Gandhi period.
[5] Tagore, *Nationalism*, Macmillan, London 1917, subsection 'Nationalism in India'.

University in 1925. 'He looked wonderful. He has aged, and his beard is longer and thicker and whiter. He sat cross-legged on a table between purple bolster cushions. He was draped in a white shawl and the purple blue light fell on his head and face – the sun shining through a stained glass window in the Senate House. It made him look like some wonderful, mystic divine being. I expect he staged and rehearsed that effect, but it was nonetheless wonderful'.[6] Gandhi would have been asking him to burn these clothes in favour of his own diametrically opposite form of dress. However, there came to be one point of agreement. In rejecting the nation as organised power, Gandhi came to agree with him in the 1940s, but not for reasons of creativity or beauty. Gandhi then, after Tagore's death, did not want the future India to be a nation in this sense, even though he reluctantly accepted that the need for police and army would persist for some time.[7] But he was very much against the industrialisation and the state power of socialism that he saw in Russia, as something that crushed the individual.[8] Instead, he came to describe the future India as composed of innumerable villages, in which life 'will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals'.[9]

I think that at the earlier date of 1921-5, the background of the poet's concern with creativity helps to explain his personal repulsion at Gandhi's insistence that he too ought to spend half an hour a day spinning home-spun thread. In *The Call of Truth*, 1921 (S. Bhattacharya pp. 71-2), he remembers that when he expressed doubts about the earlier angry resistance movement in *Swadeshi Samaj* in 1905, he merely diverted the wrath onto his own devoted head, and during Gandhi's much later movement, in *The Cult of the Charka*, 1925 (S. Bhattacharya pp. 99, 112)

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[6] Cornelia Sorabji cited in Richard Sorabji, *Opening Doors*: *The Untold Story of Cornelia Sorabji*, Penguin India, Delhi 2010, p. 178.

[7] Gandhi in *Young India*, 10 Jan 1929, repr R. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press 1986-7, vol.2, no. 265, p. 391; Gandhi on non-violent police force, 10 Aug 1940, *Harijan*, 1 Sep 1940, repr. Iyer , *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Ahmedabad 1990, Delhi 1993, no. 166, pp. 264-5.

[8] Discussion with Maurice Frydman, *Harijan*, Jan 28, 1939, repr. in R. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 3, p. 529; Interview with Nirmal Kumar Bose, published later in *The Hindustan Times*, Oct 17, 1935, *Collected Works* vol. 59, 316-320, repr. in R.Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 3, p. 600; Letter to Nehru, Oct 5 1945, repr. in Iyer *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*,, vol. 1, p. 286.

[9] 'Content of Independence', *Harijan*, July 21 1946, *Collected Works* vol. 91, p. 326.

when he did not show enthusiasm about spinning, he was censured in print, but he could not help differing from Gandhi. His reason and conscience restrained him from enlistment. One part of his objection, in *Striving for Swaraj*, 1925, (S. Bhattacharya pp. 118-9), was that homespun thread was a call of uninspiring nature, when what was needed was a great and vivid picture of the country's well-being, a supreme vision of its welfare. His own vision, we have seen, was creativity in building the country, village by village, but also in poetry and literature. In *The Cult of the Charka*, 1925, (S. Bhattacharya p. 101), he insists that at the moment of creating man, 'instead of furnishing him with an automatically revolving grindstone, God slipped into his constitution that most lively, sprightly thing called Mind', so it is not possible to convert man into a machine. This connects closely with a second objection on which Tagore insists.

2. ***Diversity of human individuals***

In the debates with Gandhi, Tagore repeatedly contrasts humans with animals as being individually diverse. In *The Call of Truth*,1921, (S. Bhattacharya pp. 68-9; 82), we have seen, he contrasts the identical hive cells of *bees* with human creativity. He also insists on differences in man's temperament and concludes that if this not acknowledged in the use of the spinning wheel, it will be at the cost of the human mind. *The Cult of the Charka*, 1925, introduces many more animals (S. Bhattacharya pp. 99-101, 112). The fact that he was not the only person to be censured for opposing the homespun campaign confirms that in creating the human mind, God 'did not have for his model the *spider* mentality doomed to a perpetual conformity in its production of web'. The division of labour between castes, we have seen, is an 'imitation of the social scheme of *ant*-life'. But no one should be annoyed or alarmed 'if all our minds refuse incessantly to reverberate one set *mantram*, in the droning chirp of the *cicadas* of the night' – a fourth animal. While admiring the Mahatma's great moral personality, he explains why his conscience cannot accept his field of work, because of the difference in their standpoints and temperaments. 'It is, however God's will that man's paths of endeavour shall be various, else why these differences of mentality'.

This is another case in which Gandhi and Tagore should in theory have been in agreement. We have already seen that Gandhi came in the 1940s to express the same dislike as Tagore's of the idea of a nation as the whole people as an organised power. But he also put a great stress on the idea, which he found in the Bhagavadgita, of people, even individual people, having a personal duty, *svadharma*, different from that of other people. This personal duty could be based on individual personality, a

factor that Tagore stressed. Gandhi too in 1940, again after the controversy with Tagore was over, addressed the Gandhi Seva Sangh,[10] which had been set up for 'constructive' work – Tagore had used the same word – which for Gandhi included spinning, but also other work, such as founding schools suited to Indian, not British, needs, or rural reconstruction, both of which, of course, Tagore had sought to carry out. Gandhi's speech insisted that not everyone should join his political campaigns of non-violent resistance, because not everyone could control their temper under retaliation. But on the other hand, he could not advise which of them could do so, and, instead of recommending all to stay with constructive work, he refused to advise individuals what to do. Moreover, by the 1940s, his constructive programme, though symbolised by the spinning wheel, offered 13 alternatives and later 18. Tagore could well have complained that Gandhi should already much earlier have recognised that spinning was incompatible with Tagore's own personal *svadharma*, and that he should have allowed Tagore to pursue his own alternatives. An attraction of spinning for Gandhi may well have been the thought that spinning is something that everybody can do, and so provides a united endeavour. But Tagore counters this thought in *Striving for Swaraj,* 1925 (S. Bhattacharya pp. 115-6) by drawing attention to his experience of agricultural workers whose whole training is to grow one crop. Their special skill and bent of mind made it too difficult for them to switch to another type of crop, even when they should have been able to see that others were making a much better living from a different crop in the same environment.

It is true that on one occasion Tagore himself forgot *svadharma* when he said against Gandhi in *On the Moral Aspects of Gandhi's Fast*, 1933, (S. Bhattacharya p. 143), 'you cannot blame them if they follow you [in fasting], … for all messages must be universal in their application'. The belief in different individual duties should allow, as the ancient Greek Stoics saw, for duties unique to one person. They said that when Julius Caesar, bent on destroying the Roman Republic, attacked the city of Utica, it was right for the Stoic Cato to commit suicide, rather than parley with him, though it would not have been right for anyone else. Not for anyone else because Cato's lifelong uncompromising stand for the Republic had no parallel.[11] No simple description of Cato could be framed in a universal law that would show why suicide would be incumbent on anyone else if they had answered to the same description

[10] Gandhi, Speech to Gandhi Seva Sangh, 22 Feb 1940, repr. R. Iyer, Moral and political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 1, pp. 415-43.
[11] Cicero *On Duties* 1. 112.

It upset Tagore that fellow-Bengalis joined in the chorus of disapproval about his resistance to spinning. In *The Call of Truth*, 1921, (S. Bhattacharya p. 78), he complains that he found 'an oppressive atmosphere seemed to burden the land. Some outside compulsion seemed to be urging one and all to talk in the same strain, to work at the same mill. When I wanted to inquire, to discuss, my well-wishers clapped their hands over my lips, saying, 'Not now, not now". On the same page, he tells of a newspaper editor who 'had the temerity to disapprove, in a feeble way, of the burning of machine-made cloth' in favour of homespun. 'The very next day, the editor was shaken out of his balance by the agitation of his readers'. Here at pp. 83-4 and in *Striving for Swaraj*, 1925 (S. Bhattacharya p.114), Tagore himself draws attention, to some of the objections to burning machine-made cloth. 'It leaves us shivering and ashamed. … Women are stuck at home naked'. If we have omitted to spin, 'that is because the thread so spun cannot compete with the product of the power mill'. Many women could afford only one sari, so if that was forcibly burnt, they had nothing to wear to go outside the house, and home-spun cloth did not provide a cheap alternative, but was, on the contrary, more expensive. Thus, despite Gandhi's own admirable commitment to non-violence, he did not always appreciate that violence was being used by his followers. I have elsewhere cited an interview in which Gandhi showed astonishment when told by his own supporter and funder, G. D. Birla, that his followers had forcibly burned machine-made cloth at Birla's mills.[12] Tagore, by contrast, had a very strong interest in the violence and betrayals that went on inside resistance movements, and wrote two novels about it, *Home and the World* in 1916 and *Four Chapters* in 1934. Although the second was written in the period of exchanges with Gandhi, neither novel was describing Gandhi's movement, which could not have been represented as based on deliberate violence and betrayal. But his objections to deliberate violence in the earlier movement of 1905 would have made him sensitive to unauthorised violence in Gandhi's own movement.

At this point, Tagore's themes of individual diversity and creativity connect with his next theme of freedom.

3. ***Freedom***

Tagore and Gandhi seem to agree again that there is a personal inner freedom and a freedom of the country, and that the inner freedom is the prior prerequisite, since freedom for the country cannot be obtained, at least with any advantage, without self-rule, whereas self-rule is valuable

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[12] Richard Sorabji, *Opening Doors, The Untold Story of Cornelia Sorabji*, London and Delhi, 2010, pp. 343-7.

in itself. But freedom (*swaraj*) for Gandhi and Tagore is nonetheless very different.[13] For Gandhi, freedom for the country is not merely home rule, rule by Indians, but home rule based on the inner freedom of self-rule for Indians as individuals. Otherwise, Indian rulers might suppress freedom as much as any others. The necessary inner self rule can only be obtained by disciplines for reducing one's desires: the disciplines, so he wrote in 1909, of non-violence, supported by chastity, poverty, truth and fearlessness.[14] With normal attachments renounced, the rulers could have no hold over you. Who was frightened when Gandhi was sent to prison? Not Gandhi, but the Viceroy, in case anything happened to Gandhi. Tagore agreed and disagreed, in *The Call of Truth*, 1921, (S. Bhattacharya pp. 71, 73, 74). He agreed that alien government in India was a chameleon. It might be the British today, other foreigners another day, and, with no less virulence, Indians the next day. But he went further. Alien government is *maya*, illusion, and will vanish of itself, if we can gain within us the truth called our country. And this requires something more positive than the disciplines of renouncing desires. It requires our inner faculties and forces. I suspect there is only an illusion of government because of the point noticed above in *Striving for Swaraj*, that a country is one's own only if one has helped to create it. Gaining within us the truth called our country, Tagore continues, requires something more positive also than Gandhi's proposal of non-cooperation with the British. In *Tagore's reflections on non-cooperation and cooperation*, 1928 (S. Bhattacharya p. 57), non-cooperation is negative and ascetic, it ignores joy, and it robs Indians of education. Moreover (*The Call of Truth*, 1921, S. Bhattacharya pp. 74-5, 80), the creation of one's country and its freedom calls, like yoga, for all the human powers and faculties, all the forces of the country, not just one exercise like spinning. The economist must think, the educationist and statesman must think and contrive. The country will not get freedom (*swaraj*) without intellect and will (*The Cult of the Charka*, 1925, S. Bhattacharya p. 103). The welfare of the people is a synthesis (*Striving for Swaraj*, 1925, S. Bhattacharya pp. 119-120) comprised of many elements. Health and work, wisdom, reason and joy must all be thrown into the crucible. The creation of the country requires all the varied powers of man along many and diverse roads. Earlier, in *Sadhana* (1913), trans. Macmillan, 1915, pp. 42, 55, 66-7, he had, not in response to Gandhi, connected individual freedom with artistic work. 'The man who is an artist finds his artistic

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[13] In this I agree with Bindu Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth*, Springer, Delhi 2015, pp. 162-6.

[14] Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (*Indian Home Rule*), in Gujerati 1909, in the English edition of Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge 1997, pp. 96-8.

freedom when he finds his ideal of art'. 'Literature … is… a thing of joy, it is freedom itself'. More generally, our soul … is continually creating for itself fresh fields of action, … because it wants freedom'. This view of personal inner freedom is expressed again in a late letter by Tagore of 1941 cited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in another book.[15] Writing of himself, Tagore said, 'Rabindranath in his sphere of creativity stands alone, history has not bound him in generality'. Again, he was not 'just a British subject in the domain of general history'. As regards historical determination, his answer 'comes from within, where I am nothing but a poet. There I am the creator, there I am by myself, I am free'.

It is in contrast with this very different view of freedom, both the country's and individual freedom, that Tagore finds wrong-headed Gandhi's, and other more traditional, restrictions. They not only restrict your freedom to act; they prohibit the actions needed for gaining the wider kind of freedom described.

In addition, he had accepted from childhood the need for freedom of religious belief. In *The Religion of Man*, Ch 6, p. 57 in Allen and Unwin's 1931 edition, he describes his freedom in childhood from any creed of his own. He was born into a family trying to develop a monotheistic religion based upon the Upanishads. But he refused to accept any religious teaching merely because people in his surroundings believed it to be true. Thus, he says, his mind was brought up in an atmosphere of freedom from the dominance of any creed that had its sanction in the definite authority of some scripture, or in the teaching of some organized body of worshippers. But correspondingly he accepts that the authority of some particular book venerated by a large number of men may have greater weight than the assertion of an individual, and therefore he never claims any right to preach. This freedom in religious belief for himself and others would have applied to the belief we saw him coming to develop in a God of rhythms who cooperated in his writing of poetry.

The restrictions he objects to from Gandhi, however, were not religious ones. In *The Call of Truth*, 1921 (S. Bhattacharya pp. 76, 78, 84), he objects to Gandhi that through the ban on dissent from his policy on homespun cloth, reason and culture are being closured. There is a call for obedience to some *mantra*, some unreasoned creed. In the name of outside freedom, the inner freedom of man is being overpowered. It is Tagore's duty to put up a fight against the habit of blindly obeying Gandhi's orders on burning cloth. It is a slave mentality which is at the root of the country's poverty. In *The Cult of the Charka*, 1925 (S.

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[15] Tagore's letter to poet Buddhadeb Bose, quoted in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore*: *An Interpretation*, Penguin Viking, Delhi 2011, p. 53 and note 110.

Bhattacharya pp. 100-101), spinning is called a *mantra*, and the caste system's rigid division of labour is compared as something that kills the mind of the creative man. In *Striving for Swaraj*, 1925, (S. Bhattacharya pp 113-4, 119), discussion of the pros and cons of spinning 'brings down a cyclonic storm' of protest. Obeying Gandhi has become an end in itself, and Tagore finds that not helpful for attaining freedom (*swaraj*).

Gandhi's call for non-cooperation with the British receives another set of objections, presenting it as an obstacle to freedom. In *The Call of Truth* (S. Bhattacharya pp. 104-5, 107, 109, and *Tagore's Reflexions on Non-cooperation and Cooperation* (S. Bhattacharya pp. 56, 59, 60-1), both of 1921, he takes up cooperation between nations. It promotes the country's freedom. Non-cooperation with the British merely robs Indians of education. The materialism of the West is needed. Europe's cultivation of science need not make man into a machine, but can rescue man from the forces of nature by harnessing them. Poverty cannot be overcome without science. It was a great day when man discovered the wheel, whether the spinning wheel, the potter's wheel, or the wheel of the vehicle. It released him from being a *shudra*, and science will still improve the spinning wheel. It is in economics, rather than religion, that Indians can cooperate. He had learnt some years ago of the principles of cooperation in agriculture, as being able to cure poverty and his *Cooperative Principles* about agriculture was to be published in 1928.

One thing that blind obedience to Gandhi brings about is the refusal to reason. Already before Gandhi, says Tagore in *The Call of Truth*, 1921, (S. Bhattacharya pp. 76, 78, 80, 82, 83), we had 'been content with surrendering their greatest right – the right to reason and judge for ourselves – to the blind forces of *shastric* injunctions and social conventions. We have refused to cross the seas because Manu told us not to. We refuse to eat with the Mussulman, because prescribed usage is against it'. Tagore had wanted to inquire, to discuss. The spirit of inquiry was needed. 'Those for whom authority is needed in place of reason will invariably accept despotism in place of freedom. That is why Tagore is so anxious to reinstate reason on its throne. But what is missing from the call to burn cloth is precise thinking. Similarly, in *Striving for Swaraj*, 1925 (S. Bhattacharya, p. 115), it is precise thinking that is missing in the expectation that the planters of one crop could spend other parts of their time in spinning.

Of the two later controversies with Gandhi, it was central to the last one in 1934, *The Bihar earthquake* (S. Bhattacharya, pp. 158-9) to charge Gandhi with encouraging unreason by saying that the earthquake was due to God's displeasure at the Hindu custom of treating some Hindus as untouchable. Moreover, Tagore's criticism of unreason connected it with unfreedom: 'unreason, which is a fundamental source of all the blind

powers that drive us against freedom and self-respect'. On the other hand, in the 1933 controversy, *On the moral aspects of the fast* (S. Bhattacharya, pp. 142-3), the central point was not one about reason. Gandhi was fasting as an expiation and as a public and life-threatening protest at the Hindu practice of Untouchability, but had forbidden others to fast. Tagore complained that expiation required Gandhi to stay alive and continue his daily work for the sake of the ignorant who maintained the practice and of the victims. His fast would not deter the first, and his death not help the second. His example might lead to the elimination of other noble souls, and lead lesser men into the dark abyss of self-mortification. Having urged others to help extirpate the practice, and publicly announced his fast to that end, how could he forbid others to fast? All messages must be universal. If only his death would be efficacious, that would have to be as some mystic rite, kept secret from others and requiring only one victim – this alternative is the only, indirect, reference to unreason. What Tagore further adds is that Gandhi's fast detracts from the dignity of the nation.

Tagore's objections to unreason in Gandhi and to the suppression of reasoning by his followers and the requirement of blind obedience, are connected with loss of freedom. But they state only the negative side, by identifying the most pressing *obstacle* to freedom. They are not the positive account of freedom in terms of creativity, and reason is not the only thing required to bring the country's freedom about. In *The Call of Truth*, 1921 (S. Bhattacharya pp. 74-5, 78, 81), it is not only reason, but also *culture* that Tagore finds 'closured' by Gandhi's followers. What the country's freedom required was a *yoga* involving *all* the inner faculties of humans and *all* the forces of the country in the work of its creation. In *Striving for Swaraj*, 1925, (S. Bhattacharya p. 119), 'the welfare of the people is a synthesis comprised of *many* elements'. Reason is only one of them. In order that the result may be fullness of welfare, 'Health and work, reason, wisdom and joy, must all be thrown into the crucible'. Joy is important and it is one of the elements emphasised in Tagore's account of his work as a poet.

4 *Truth*

Truth was very central to Gandhi's whole policy of life, and his conception of it is unusual. Bindu Puri, who discusses this very well, has also made the good point that Tagore was more interested in the untruth in Gandhi and his followers than in the nature of truth for its own sake.[16] I should like to reinforce this point. In *The Religion of Man* (1930 lectures,

[16] Bindu Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth*, Springer, Delhi 2015, Ch. 3 on Gandhi, p. 108.

published Macmillan 1931, Ch. 9, pp. 84-5), Tagore, writing about the artist, distinguishes truth, fact and reality. ‘Truth is the infinite pursued by metaphysics; fact is the infinite pursued by science, while reality is the definition of the infinite which relates truth to science’. Tagore’s special interest here is in art and therefore in what he calls reality rather than truth. He says: ‘The only evidence of truth in art exists when it compels us to say, ‘I see’. A donkey we may pass by in Nature, but a donkey in art we must acknowledge even if it be a creature that disreputably ignores all its natural history responsibility, even if it resembles a mushroom in its head and a palm-leaf in its tail’.

I have been saying something about freedom parallel to the point about truth. Just as Tagore’s debate with Gandhi shows interest in untruth rather than in the nature of truth, so also, insofar as Gandhi and his followers are concerned, Tagore’s concern with them is as sources of unfreedom. But there the parallel ends. I think Tagore has built up his very own concept of what the freedom of the country would be. Of course, it was Gandhi, not Tagore, whose revival of Indian morale and international sympathy proved central (among other factors) in bringing home rule to India. But Tagore had a positive conception of personal freedom and of the country’s freedom not only different from Gandhi’s, but very interesting in its own right.